

**U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Malta Field Office
501 S. 2nd St. E
Malta, MT 59538**

**Decision Record and Leasing Recommendation
Environmental Assessment DOI-BLM-MT-M010-2011-0028-EA**

Decision:

It is my decision to implement Alternative C (the Preferred Alternative) as identified in the Malta Field Office (MaFO) Oil and Gas Leasing Environmental Assessment (EA), DOI-BLM-MT-M010-2011-0028-EA in which 4 of the 25 lease parcels (4 whole, 4 partial) containing approximately 2,769 acres of federal minerals would be offered for lease at the October 18, 2011 competitive sale. Competitive leases will be issued for parcels sold at the sale, and noncompetitive leases may be issued for applications filed during the 2-year period following the sale. The remaining 21 parcels considered in the EA containing approximately 32,507 federal mineral acres in whole or part would be deferred due to greater sage-grouse and/or Sprague's pipit habitat, and are pending completion of the Resource Management Plan (RMP).

Authorities:

The authority for this decision is contained in 43 CFR 3100.

Compliance and Monitoring:

Should the parcels be developed, monitoring may be required and would be addressed and analyzed under future NEPA documentation.

Terms, Conditions, and Stipulations:

For all parcels, standard terms and conditions, as well as the lease notices and stipulations identified by parcel in Appendix A of the EA, would apply and be attached to the lease parcel(s).

Plan Conformance and Consistency:

The alternatives have been reviewed and found to be in conformance with the land use decisions described in the: Phillips Management Framework Plan (MFP) (1977) and the Oil & Gas Environmental Assessment of the BLM Leasing Program – Lewistown District (September 1981). Although the Judith-Valley-Phillips (JVP) Resource Management Plan (RMP), as amended, was approved in 1994, to guide management of all resources within the planning area, it did not make specific decisions relative to leasing of fluid minerals due to a protest on the 1992 Final RMP. The leasing of nominated parcels not requiring special wildlife stipulations has continued in the planning area through reliance on the leasing decisions made in previous land use plans and programmatic analyses.

Alternatives Considered:

Alternative A – No Action. The No Action alternative would exclude all 25 lease parcels within the MaFO from lease sale. Surface management would remain the same and ongoing oil and gas development would continue on surrounding federal, private, and state leases.

Alternative B – Proposed Action. The Proposed Action alternative would offer all 25 lease parcels, covering 35,275 acres for competitive and/or noncompetitive lease issuance, in conformance with the land use planning decisions. The lease parcel number, size, and detailed locations and associated stipulations are listed in Appendix A of the EA. Standard terms and conditions, as well as stipulations identified in Appendix A of the EA would apply.

Alternative C – BLM Preferred Alternative. The Preferred Alternative would be to offer 4 parcels (4 whole, 4 partial), containing 2,769 acres of federal minerals for competitive and/or noncompetitive lease issuance. The lease parcels to be offered are located within the MaFO and are dispersed across Phillips County. Standard terms and conditions, as well as stipulations identified in Appendix A of the EA would apply.

The preferred alternative would defer a total of 21 lease parcels in whole or part (32,507 acres of federal minerals) from the upcoming lease sale due to greater sage-grouse and/or Sprague's pipit habitat, and are pending completion of the Resource Management Plan (RMP). Therefore, these lease parcels would be deferred at this time pending further review and analysis.

Public Comments:

This EA was made available for a 30-day public comment period which ended on June 14, 2011. No comments were received regarding the EA during the 30 day comment period. Although no comments were received, some modifications were made to the EA, and are denoted with gray-scale shading and/or strikeout in the updated EA. Refer to Chapter 5 of the updated EA for a summary of public participation and changes made to the EA.

Rationale for the Decision:

The decision to approve Alternative C, the preferred alternative, is based on the following:

1) consistency with resource management and land use plans; 2) national policy; 3) agency statutory requirements; 4) relevant resource issues; and 5) application of measures to avoid or minimize environmental impacts.

1. The decision is in conformance with Phillips Management Framework Plan (MFP) (1977) and the Oil & Gas Environmental Assessment of the BLM Leasing Program – Lewistown District (September 1981). Although the Judith-Valley-Phillips (JVP) Resource Management Plan (RMP), as amended, was approved in 1994, to guide management of all resources within the planning area, it did not make specific decisions relative to leasing of fluid minerals due to a protest on the 1992 Final RMP. The leasing of nominated parcels not requiring special wildlife stipulations has continued in the planning area through reliance on the leasing decisions made in previous land use plans and programmatic analyses.

2. It is the policy of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) as derived from various laws, including the Mineral Leasing Act of 1920, as amended [30 U.S.C. 181 *et seq.*] and the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, to make mineral resources available for disposal and to encourage development of mineral resources to meet national, regional, and local needs.
3. The decision is consistent with all federal, state, and county authorizing actions required for implementation of the Preferred Alternative.
4. Standard terms and conditions as well as special stipulations would apply. Lease stipulations (as required by Title 43 Code of Federal Regulations 3101.1-3) were added to each parcel as identified by the MaFO to address site specific resource concerns or new information not identified in the planning process.

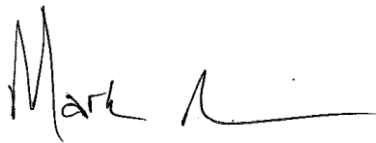
Recommended by:



Richard E. Adams, Field Manager

Date September 16, 2011

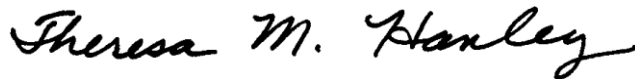
Concurrence by:



Mark K. Albers, District Manager

Date September 16, 2011

Approved by:



Theresa M. Hanley, Deputy State Director, Division of Resources

Date September 19, 2011